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## PLEA FOR MORE AMERICAN MUSEUMS OF FINE ARTS

To some persons the fine arts signify or suggest superfluous luxury, sumptuous living, ostentatious display—all leading to moral degeneracy and national decay. To others they signify harmless and easily dispensable frivolity, like dessert at the end of a substantial meal. By others they are regarded as furnishing really valuable enjoyment, which should be added, however, only after all material wants and conveniences have been provided.

By another class of persons the fine arts are esteemed the highest field of human activity, the noblest product of civilization, giving refreshment along the pathway of life, bringing cheer to the weary and the suffering, lifting humanity to the realm of ideality and spiritual exaltation, and foreshadowing the infinite joy of heavenly existence. By others they are considered to derive their importance from the fact that they give valuable aid in general education, especially by training the mind to quickness and accuracy of perception, more particularly in the study of the natural sciences. By still others they are prized because they may be made powerful agents in promoting the material prosperity of a country.

History has abundantly proved that the character, the career, the wealth, the influence, and the glory indeed of a city or a nation are determined in a very large degree by its attitude toward the fine arts. This is particularly manifest in studying the existing leading cities and nations of the world. It is beyond question that the future prosperity, character, influence, and reputation of our cities and of our country at large will be modified in a very large degree by whether or not museums of fine arts shall be liberally sustained by the municipalities and by individual contributions from citizens in general proportion to their wealth.

First among the benefits accruing from such museums should be mentioned the culturing influence, the elevation of taste, the refinement of feeling, the nobility of sentiment which will be awakened by the presence in a city of a well-arranged gallery, which is open at stated times to people of all ages and classes, and which shows, in originals or in reproductions, works by the great artistic geniuses of all ages and countries.

Here we should stop to note that a museum differs from a formal school in this marked feature, that while a school is of necessity limited to attendance by the young, of a certain age and for only a few years, a museum is available and serviceable at all times, to people

of every age, from the prattling child to the gray-haired sage; to people of every occupation, condition, and station in life; to people of every grade of culture, from the unlettered peasant to the most profound philosopher; to those of every religious creed or of no creed; to those of native or foreign birth; to the resident citizen and the transient guest; to the casual or frivolous visitor to the galleries and the earnest and serious student; to the professional artist and his patron.

Indeed, a museum may well be called a perpetual school, which has no formal curriculum, conducts no examinations, keeps no register of its students, gives no diplomas, and in which no person can ever complete its course of study. Who can estimate the amount of culture and refinement which a museum of fine arts will diffuse among the inhabitants of a city within a single generation, or even a decade?

A museum of fine arts is a valuable adjunct to the public library and the public schools in the educational system of a city. As drawing is now taught by such excellent methods, the pupils of the schools, who visit a museum in very large numbers, have increased capacity for understanding and appreciating, and increased appetite for enjoying the pictures, statuary, and objects of decorative art that from time to time are exhibited in the galleries. Thus inspired with a feeling for the true and noble in art, and with an apprehension of its true significance, they will return to their drawing lessons with renewed zest and interest.

Such as shall enter the mechanical trades will become more skillful workmen by this increased ability in drawing. Occasionally latent genius will be awakened in a pupil by seeing in actuality these works of eminent artists, and he will rise to distinction in some branch of art and reflect honor and fame upon his native city.

Again, teachers in the public schools will receive inspirations from studying noble, artistic productions of human genius, and will carry renewed enthusiasm back to their class-rooms. To teacher and pupil alike, and to any person pursuing historical readings, as from the public library, a pictorial or plastic representation of a historical subject or personage is more impressive, more interesting, and more vivid than a written description can be. Or rather, the written description and the ocular view unite to make the mental impression complete. Thus does a museum supplement the school and the library in a complete system of education.

To the practical mechanic, working at his trade, a museum of art is pre-eminently useful. Here he will see examples of the best decoration—as carved furniture, porcelain, tapestries, and architectural ornamentation. With these models of beauty before him, his perceptions of form and color, of the true principles of decorative design, will be lifted to the standards of the highest ideals. In consequence, he will become a more skilled workman, will be more valuable to his

employer, and will command higher wages for himself. The heads of manufacturing establishments will also feel the stimulus to improve the quality of the wares they produce, and will thus bring increased wealth to themselves and better wages to their employees, and will add to the fame and prosperity of the city.

That this is not a mere theory, but is substantial fact, is proven, for example, in the history of British manufactures. The first great world's fair, held in London fifty years ago, revealed to the English how far inferior in beauty and elegance of design their manufactures were to those of continental Europe, especially to those of Germany, France, and Belgium. The South Kensington Museum of Applied Art was immediately established. Upon this has been expended over eighteen million dollars, the expenditure of last year being over six hundred thousand dollars. The effect upon the artistic quality of English manufactured wares of all kinds was instantaneous and far-reaching.

It is recognized that every pound thus expended has returned hundreds of pounds to British manufacturers, to invested capital, to employed labor, and to every line of trade and agriculture that is benefited by the existence of vast manufacturing establishments. The relation of museums of art to municipal prosperity and to national wealth has long been understood in Europe.

The more a city renders itself enjoyable to its own inhabitants, the more will it attract people of wealth and refinement from the adjacent regions, as transient or permanent residents. Why do American travelers, on landing in Europe, rush, without stopping, away from rich and mercantile Liverpool, Havre, or Hamburg, but remain in Dresden, Munich, and Florence as long as possible? Because Dresden, Munich, and Florence contain vast treasures of the masterpieces of art.

Dresden, for example, with a quarter of a million of inhabitants, depends for its prosperity almost solely upon its remarkable artistic attractions, especially upon its numerous and marvelously rich museums, which draw to that city immense numbers of travelers every year, and large colonies of transient residents of various nationalities, especially English, Americans, and Russians. What would Paris be without the Louvre and other museums, the inventorial value of whose treasures mounts into hundreds of millions of dollars? Yet new treasures are being added constantly, to maintain the supremacy of Paris as the art capital of the world.

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